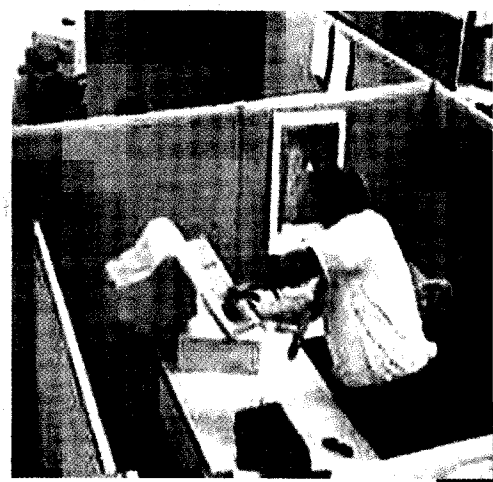
BY JIM CARROLL

Tech Stress

Positive attitude proves to be the key to handling technological advances



OK, SO EVERYONE HAS THE OCCASIONAL BAD DAY, RIGHT? Particularly when it comes to technology. Maybe that it is why in early June, no one was really surprised when a British organization reported the results of a study that indicated that one out of every four people admitted to physically attacking and abusing their computers.

When it comes to sales forces and technology, we live in very perilous times. With an increasing corporate emphasis on systems that impact the salesforce, having a bad attitude won't suffice, and indeed, might come to work against our future career success. Sure, we can struggle with technology, but we better accept it at the same time.

Now don't get me wrong – I do realize that there are countless people who still struggle with computer technology on a day-to-day basis. And I think it comes from our upbringing – baby boomers are the last generation in the history of mankind to not have grown up with a computer since birth, and so we have some rather unique psychological baggage that we carry around. Think about it-we've gone from punch cards and university courses in COBOL, to massive paper reports spewing out of mini-computers, to microcomputers that seem to tell us that we've had an "Unrecoverable Application Error" every time we need a really important file.

So sure, we need to be forgiven for the fact that many of us find it difficult to master technology. But having said that, I think that sometimes our attitude can get in the way, and could soon have a rather negative impact upon our career success.

Why? Many companies have finally figured out e-biz, the Internet and other technologies. They are now spending significant sums on systems and technologies that will impact what you do as a sales professional. CRM (custom relationship management) systems, online ordering initiatives, supply chain management and other tools of e-biz have changed the way that sales professionals do their jobs.

Of course, the successful implementation of such systems requires the support and involvement of all sales staff, which unfortunately is not always forthcoming. It isn't just the technological baggage and lack of skills that contribute to salespeoples' apathy towards technology. Suspicion is also a big concern.

As a consultant, I'm often called in to companies to assist management in helping sales and other staff gain an understanding of the critical goals and importance of an e-biz strategy, and as a result, witness this "suspicion" first hand.

I went into one company that had put in place an electronic ordering system, and was dealing with sales staff who thought the reason for the system, was to put them out of a job. Now, the e-biz strategy behind the effort was extremely valid – the company was trying to move towards its goal of having 50% of corporate customer orders driven through its website. By doing so, it would shave a significant amount of the cost off the day-to-day routine orders. Yet there was another reason why there was the desire to have the website become a key part of the ordering process: if customers did routine orders on their own, sales staff would be freed up and could better spend their time with the customer. That is, sales staff could concentrate on selling, rather than simply writing up routine orders.

But the sales staff viewed the matter differently. Many of them believed that the purpose of the online ordering project was to put them out of a job. Their thinking was, "Well, if our customers are buying through the website, I won't be needed." Many of them failed to see that the real goal of the

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A screen shot of a video known as "Bad Day" quickly became a worldwide phenomena through the Internet. Ostensibly caught on a hidden camera, it shows a fellow beating up his own computer out of frustration. (To see the motion video, visit http://rigaut.home.cern.ch/rigaut/badday.html).

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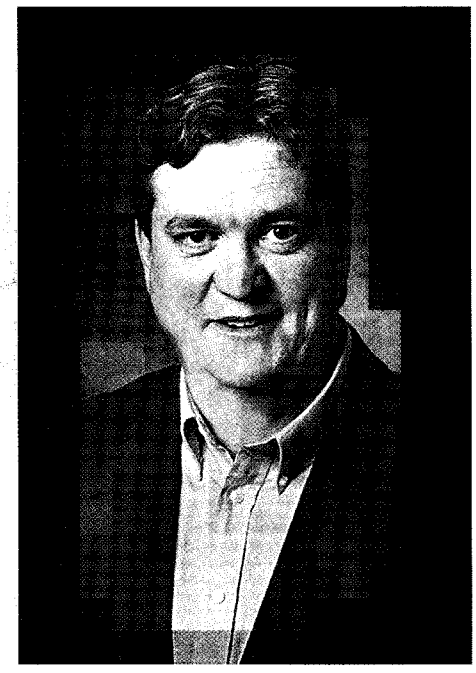
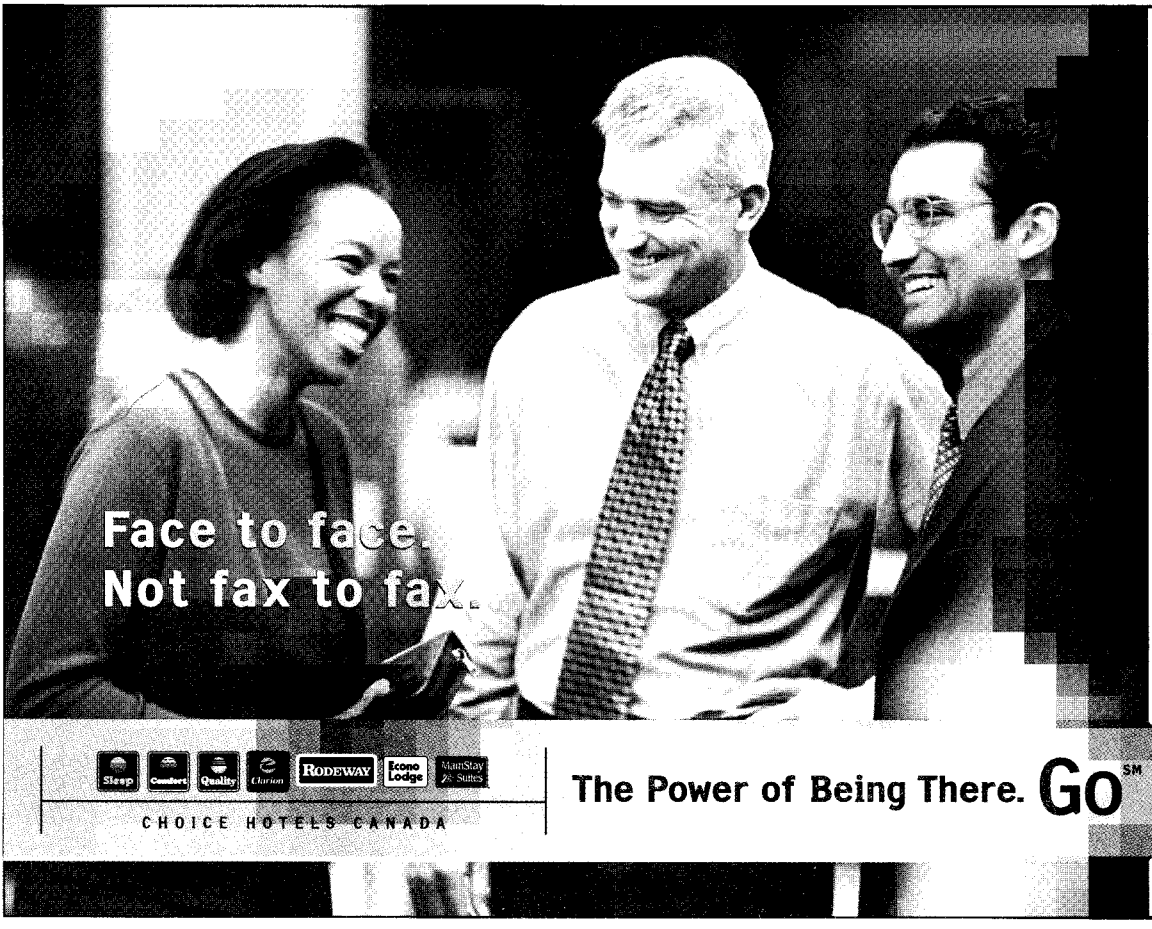
project was to free up their time so that they could do what they do best – selling!

The result was that the organization and its sales staff often worked at cross-purposes. The company was busy promoting its e-commerce procurement initiative, while sales-staff were busy doing everything they could to steer customers away from it.

This type of misguided suspicion is common, and is why organizations need to work hard to ensure that all staff members understand why they are doing what they are doing. And why sales professionals should get over their technological baggage and take the time to really understand what is going on with the ongoing implementation of sales based technology.



Jim Carroll has been helping people cope with a world of technological change for almost 20 years as a keynote speaker, award-winning columnist and author. He is the author of "Surviving the Information Age" and co-author of "Selling Online" and "Light Bulbs to Yattabits."



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